

**SOPN Board of Director's Meeting
Via Teleconference February 24, 2004
9:00 AM Mountain Time, 10:00 AM Central Time**

Attending: Bruce Bingham, Board Member (IMR I+M Regional Coordinator), Karren Brown, Board Member (Supt. LAMR/ALFL), Brian Carey, Network Coordinator Supervisor (LYJO Chief of Resource Mngt. and Visitor Protection), Mitzi Frank, Board Chair (Supt. FOUN), Alden Miller, Board Member (Chief of Resources and Facilities, WABA), Dusty Perkins, Board Member (SOPN Network Coordinator), Heidi Sosinski (SOPN Data Manager)

Meeting began at 10:00 AM Central Time

I. Briefly describe SOPN progress so far

A) Overview of current budget situation: Due to the recent budget cut, SOPN had to rewrite the final work plan. The details of the revisions were sent to the board and technical committee for comment. The revised final workplan was sent to Bruce on February 22, who approved it and sent it to WASO I+M on February 23.

B) Prairie Restoration Proposals: For now, the prairie restoration proposal will be shelved. The proposal had scored highly for Cooperative Conservation Initiative (CCI), but this fund source was eliminated by Congress. It also scored high within the region for NRPP-Natural Resource Management, but this fund source was reprogrammed to cover the budget cuts in the I&M program. It is possible that CCI may return in FY06. There are other additional fund sources we could go after in the future.

C) Sand Creek Inventory Proposals: SAND was added to SOPN after the network was established and funding has not been provided for their inventories. However, in order to proceed with vital signs planning some inventory information is essential. SOPN will treat SAND as a full park in the network, however funding priority will have to be given to the first 10, the Board has given guidance to SOPN to seek additional funds for these inventories. SOPN has obtained \$10,000 from the Rocky Mountain CESU for a plant inventory which will be matched by \$13,000 from SOPN. Roy Roath from Colorado State will do the plant work. This inventory will provide necessary information to conduct long term monitoring, thus it was deemed a high priority. SOPN was also successful in receiving \$36,000 from the Small Park Block Grant for rare species inventory at SAND. This is a 2-year project beginning in FY2006. A bird inventory was funded with \$5,000 in FY2004 end of year funds to the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and will start field work in 2005.

D) Staffing plan update: A full staffing plan will be required with the final Phase 3 report that will be finished no later than October 1, 2008. However the Board wanted SOPN to develop an interim staffing plan that would cover the time developing the Phase 3 report. The plan was developed and presented in detail to the Technical Committee in December. The plan was then approved by the Board via email on January 4, 2005. The implications of the plan for this year are to hire an ecologist/Ph.D. student at University of Colorado, Boulder, who will be matching our funds approximately 2:1. We had originally planned for another student at Texas A+M, but this may not be possible in FY2005 due to budget cuts. Benefits of a graduate student over a permanent employee include cost savings, flexibility in budgets, and the breadth of knowledge available from the Ph.D. student's advisor. These students will work part-time as ecologists and will develop survey protocols as part of their dissertation work. SOPN wanted to give the Board an opportunity to discuss the plan. No discussion.

E) SOPN is funding an assistanceship with the University of Colorado with grassland expert (Tim Seastedt). Dr. Seastedt also has extensive experience with the Konza and Niwot Ridge Long Term Ecological Research sites. SOPN provided an opportunity to review the task agreement. **Task agreement was approved without comment.**

F) Final inventory reports for LAMR, ALFL, CHIC, and WABA have now been received. The only outstanding inventory report is a bird inventory at WABA which was funded by the park and not SOPN. Dusty has contacted the PI of the WABA bird report, but has not heard when they plan to submit the final report. The last remaining product of the inventories is NPSpecies data entry which is in progress for LAMR, ALFL, CHIC, WABA, and LYJO.

G) Kathy Jope from the PWR is conducting a grant writing workshop May 3-5, 2005 in Austin. A final location has not yet been selected. Priority will be given personnel from SOPN affiliated parks. SOPN lobbied to get this workshop here at the request of the Board at our August, 2004 meeting.

H) National and IMR Meeting Update:

1. Support for the Natural Resource Challenge is waning. It will probably level off at approximately \$77 million of original \$100 million goal. Eight I+M networks (including SOPN) are still not fully funded in FY2005. In FY2006, NPS plans to divert NRPP funds to fund the networks because it was determined that it's easier to find project money than money for permanent staffing and programs.

2. Bruce Bingham advocated for IMR networks that are fully funded to assist the unfunded networks (SOPN and CHDN). Ideas for help include using other network coordinators as facilitators, sending Heidi to work with another data manager, and assistance with NPSpecies certification.

3. Two IMR workshops have been proposed. One will involve communication between monitoring program and park managers. One Superintendent from each network will be invited. SODN (Tucson, AZ area) may host this in the early summer or fall. The other workshop will involve sample design. The target audience will be ecologists and coordinators.

II. Budget and workplan issues

The projects listed below were cancelled or reduced due to the recent budget cut. SOPN wanted to discuss them in more detail to the board.

A) Vegetation mapping – The LAMR/ALFL vegetation mapping project is now underway. It was decided at the last SOPN meeting to offer \$40K to forward fund vegetation mapping. After discussion with the vegetation mapping program, it was decided that the most efficient way to use these funds was to start mapping at several small parks (LYJO, BEOL, SAND, CAVO, WABA, FOLS, and FOUN). SOPN had to inform the mapping program that budget cuts forced us to cancel these funds. However the vegetation mapping program has agreed to proceed providing SOPN can assist with logistics and each park can assist with field work. It was decided to push CHIC and PECO back due to their size.

B) NPSpecies certification will be cut back to only include vertebrate taxa categories. Plant certification will be held off until FY06

C) The Texas A+M Ph.D. assistantship has been cut for now. Gillian Bowser is currently searching for possible funds matching opportunities that may allow us to fund this in FY2005 at a lower level.

D) The Sand Creek plant inventory was reduced from the planned amount, but has been replaced with the Rocky Mountain CESU grant.

E) Funding additional conceptual models has been shelved for now. We may be able to create several lesser priority models by revising examples from other networks.

III. Grassland Conceptual Model Workshop

- A) The workshop was held February 1-2, 2005 at the Coyote Hills Guest Ranch (Cheyenne, OK). Twenty-six people total attended. All 11 parks were represented and 10 outside experts attended the workshop. Day 1 focused on reviewing the grassland conceptual models. The parks were asked to provide their input on how models could be altered to be more useful to them and the experts reviewed the models to ensure their completeness and accuracy. Day 2 focused on reviewing the list of issues raised during the first round of scoping sessions at the individual parks. Prior to the workshop, the issues were linked to potential vital signs with monitoring objectives and had draft justification statements for issues pertinent to grasslands.
- B) The issues were reviewed and a final product was a list of potential grassland issues to be considered as vital signs.
- C) Possible changes for next workshop include bringing on a different facilitator and providing clearer guidance to the groups. A meeting notes write up will be forthcoming.

IV. Conceptual model Update

- A) Dan Tinker is currently incorporating comments received during the grassland model workshops.
- B) Sue Braumiller will be developing the reservoir and riverine models. If we have additional funds at the end of the year, we will be following Sue's suggestion and bring on Melissa Trammell for her vertebrate expertise. Board was given an opportunity to review the draft cooperative agreement. No comments were made requesting changes in the draft agreement.
- C) D. Perkins and the ecologist / Ph.D student will investigate revising existing models for wetlands, pinion-juniper, and eastern deciduous forests.
- D) During the workshop, landscape vulnerability models were identified as being important to the network. John Gross mentioned that other networks are currently developing these and suggested that we wait until they are complete in FY06. We will wait until these are complete before assessing any additional SOPN needs.
- E) It can be difficult to develop a conceptual model that works for multiple parks. It was suggested that conceptual diagrams that are based on the models be constructed to fill this need. A conceptual diagram is a basic overview of how an ecosystem works which can be used by management and interpretation.

V. SOPN annual board meeting and Conceptual model workshop (Rivers, Reservoirs, and Wetlands)

- A.) Dusty recommended combining the aquatic conceptual model workshop with our annual meeting. This would result in a full week meeting. Dusty recommended that we not hold this meeting in conjunction with the SOPN+4 funding meeting. Possible locations were Las Vegas, NM, Denver, Austin, and Sulphur, OK.
- B.) The Board discussed whether the SOPN+4 meeting could be conducted via conference call. Given that SOPN
- C.) Action Item: The conceptual model workshop and annual meeting will be combined. The SOPN +4 meeting will not be held with the annual meeting. Mitzi will look into hotels in Las Vegas, NM that would be able to meet our needs. A second choice would be Denver. Dusty will send an email to Board and Technical Committee for the following weeks as possible meeting dates, June 13, August 1, and August 8.**

VI. NPSpecies certification

- A) WASO I+M has stated that all certification should be complete in FY05
- B) Our reduced budget has resulted in a reduced goal for FY2005 to complete certification for vertebrates via contracts with inventory PIs. B. Carey suggested contacting state agencies as an additional source of certification help. A primary reason for using inventory PIs on a contract basis is that most SOPN parks do not have additional biologists who are familiar with the park species who could do this certification. Other networks have used this approach for certification.
- C) SOPN plans to get all data (plants and vertebrates) entered in FY2005. This is almost complete.
- D) Push back plants until FY06. Plants will probably be more of a workshop setting, as opposed to contracts.

VII. SOPN plans for the remainder of FY05

- A) BEOL wetland inventory – D. Perkins will be working with BEOL staff to draft objectives and find a cooperator. Completing this inventory is one of SOPN's high priorities. A cooperative agreement will be presented to the Board for review.
- B) SAND bird inventory – The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory has been retained to perform this inventory and complete field work in 2005.
- C) SAND plant inventory – Roy Roth from Colorado State University will be performing the plant inventory. In addition, information from this project can be used to help develop a vegetation map for SAND.
- D) Strategic plan – A strategic plan will be part of the final Phase 3 report. However the Board has requested that a strategic plan be drafted to get us to the Phase 3 report. Dusty is working on the plan.
- E) The Phase I report is due October 1, 2005. This report gives background information about the ecosystems in the network, results from the scoping, summaries of park resource management activities, and the conceptual models.
- F) Training – Due to budget cuts, both Dusty and Heidi have cancelled their trip to the George Wright Society conference. Upcoming training plans include:
 - 1) Heidi – Training with other data manager. Attend NPSpecies certification workshop.
 - 2) Dusty – Two IMR workshops. Fundamentals V – June. Supervisor's training.
- G) Phase 2 Plans: A prioritization workshop will be conducted sometime in early FY2006. These workshops will be conducted in a similar manner to the grassland workshop with both parks and outside experts participating in the prioritization of vital signs. This will then be followed up by a final selection workshop with the TC and/or Board. Outside experts may be present at the selection workshop, but they will not vote on the actual selection of vital signs.

Adjourned 11:30 Central Standard Time